

MAY 1984 • \$1.75

Sea

THE MAGAZINE FOR WESTERN YACHTSMEN

**HARBOR
HOPPING:**
Santa Barbara,
Tillamook Bay,
Stillwater Cove



SPEED & FLAIR:

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**PERFORMANCE
BOATS**

SECTION:

**NEW IN
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RIALS:

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BACK TO SQUARE ONE

Max Fleischmann had a great idea in 1926 to develop Santa Barbara harbor, but the project needs a new start.

Story & photography by Peter Howorth

Santa Barbara. The first breath of fresh air north of Los Angeles. Home of the Queen of the Missions. A balmy town steeped in Spanish tradition. So the travel ads tout.

Santa Barbara also has a harbor frequently cited as the epitomy of poor design. It never used to be that way. In Richard Henry Dana's day, it was an open roadstead. Like most other anchorages in Southern California at the time, it was completely vulnerable to southeast storms.

In 1926, millionaire Max Fleischmann decided he wanted some protection for his yacht. He donated funds to the city to help build a breakwater. Rocks were blasted out of the cliff at Frys Harbor, at nearby Santa Cruz Island, and transported across the channel in barges.

The boulders were placed parallel to shore, forming a detached breakwater. The harbor, really still an anchorage, was open at both ends, allowing a flushing action. Even so, sand began to build up along the beach. The breakwater sheltered the area from waves but prevented the surf from scouring out the sand build-up. This was the first mistake.

Later, an arm was built connecting the breakwater to land at the west end of the harbor. Sand began to build up west of the arm until it stretched all the way out to the old breakwater. The currents carried the sand along the breakwater. When sand filled the whole stretch, it began eddying around the end, forming a sand bar.



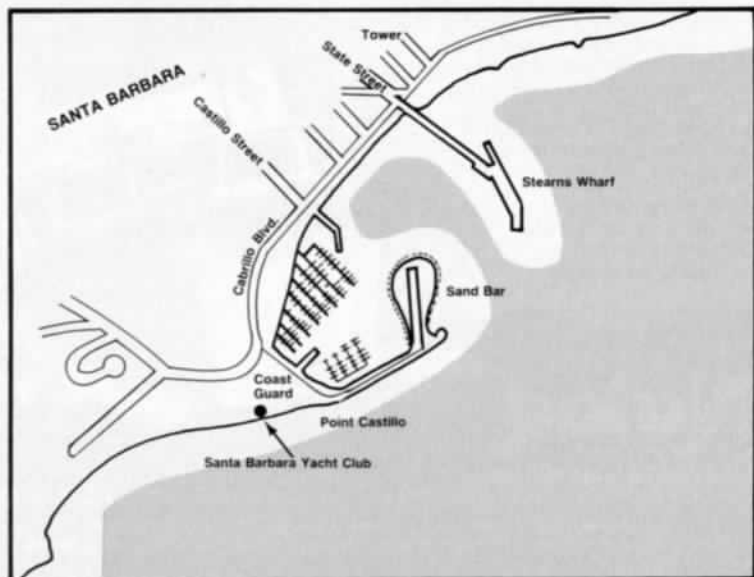
The sand bar provided so much protection that a marina could be built. The sand bar and breakwater were left unchanged, marking the second mistake. As the sand bar built up, the entrance became clogged and the sailing basin off West Beach became inundated with sand. Dredging became necessary, but to protect the marina, the sand bar had to be maintained. The same sand that drifted into the entrance from the sand bar was often sluiced right back.

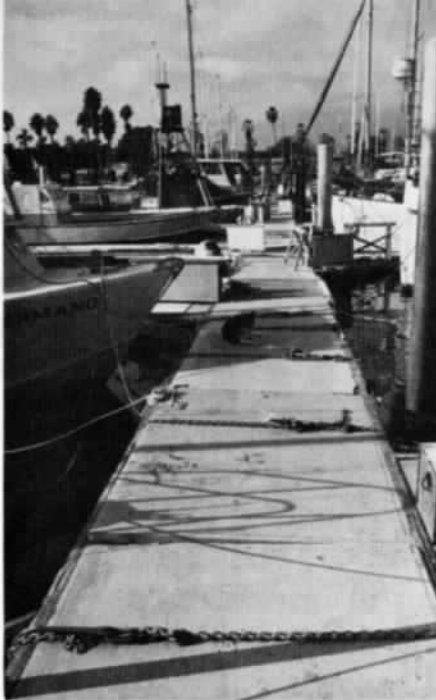
Meanwhile, the West Beach area was literally filling up with sand. Popular sailing spots were left high and dry. Waves began to break in the new shoal under the Harbor Restaurant at Stearn's Wharf. To protect

the launch ramp area in the harbor itself, another jetty was built seaward from West Beach.

This did protect part of the harbor, but at the expense of allowing still more sand to build up at West Beach. Another mistake, or perhaps the first of what is now known by locals as the Band-Aid solutions.

In time, nearly every available spot in the harbor was lined with slips. The sand bar protected the slips except during southeast storms that occurred during high tides. To bolster the protection offered by the sand bar and to stabilize it, pilings were driven in and stout planks were bolted across them. This formed another breakwater of sorts. It also meant the sand bar





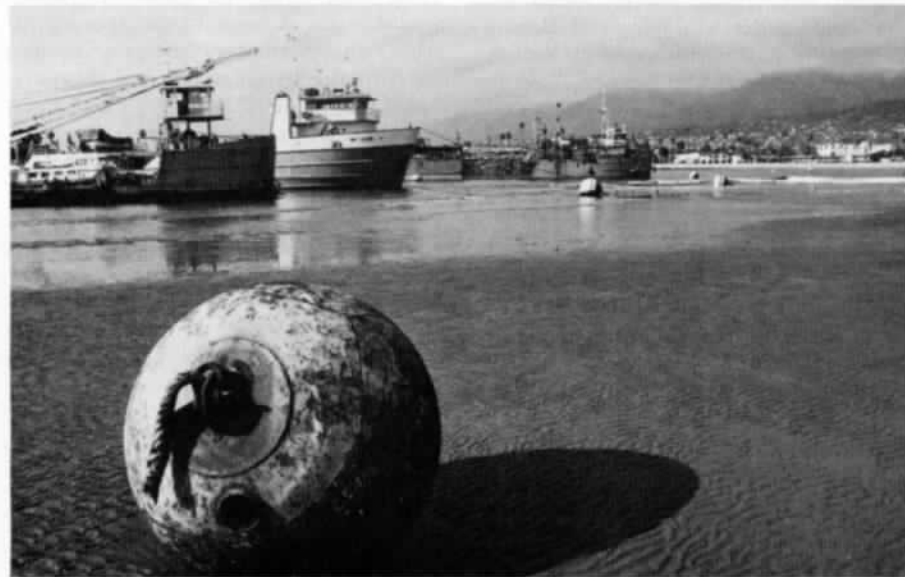
Santa Barbara's problems include waves breaking inside the harbor, left, docks held together with chains, above, and a sandbar build-up in mooring areas, below. City is now studying long-term corrective measures to restore this prime anchorage.

would be there to stay.

Or so they thought. Last year's storms blasted sand through the barrier, filling up the mooring area within the harbor. Waves soon broke on both sides of the barrier, only to be reduced to matchwood. Sand filled the entrance, sealing the harbor off for nearly three months.

Charter boat operators and fishermen considered a class action suit against the city to recoup their losses. Boat owners formed a group to express their concerns and give advice to the city. The Harbor Preservation Task Force, appointed by the city council, came up with a long-term plan to improve the harbor design and provide protection against storms.

These actions marked a much-needed departure from the hodgepodge additions of the past. The harbor finally was being examined from an overall design standpoint. The first priority was to protect the existing harbor from further damage. Moffatt and Nichols, marine engineers, came up with a reasonably inexpensive solution to the immediate problem. This was to build a high rock wall over the wooden buttress on the sand bar. The boulders dissipated the force of the waves and allowed the sand bar to build back up again. Although this only perpetuated the old problem of sand build-up, it did prevent the complete disintegration of many slips and extensive damage to boats.



HARBOR HOPPING

A new dredge was brought in to suck out the mooring area. It is all-electric, powered by a transformer station on Stearn's Wharf. An extension cord runs along the bottom to the dredge. Like all electric appliances, this one has been fraught with problems.

At this point, the harbor is better protected than in the past, but entrance shoaling is still a problem. Eventually, the long-term solutions may become a reality, but for the moment, Santa Barbara Harbor can be difficult to enter.

Strangers should radio the harbormaster on VHF Channel 16, then switch to a working frequency for up-to-date information on entrance conditions. Although the channel markers are moved periodically, they do not always reflect the safest course. In fact, at one time they were completely out of the water on the sand bar.

At night, Santa Barbara is a nightmare to strangers. The feeble lights at the entrance can easily be lost amidst the bright city lights. An extremely sharp lookout, plus regular checks of the depth, are essential.

The words of the "Coast Pilot No. 7" are quite accurate: "... strangers making for the harbor at night failed to identify the breakwater light, failed to see the sand bar, but saw the masts in the harbor and steered toward them, consequently running hard aground on the sand bar."

Fortunately, such groundings are uncommon. Most strangers are very cautious, for they know the harbor's reputation.

Once safe inside, however, Santa Barbara is everything it's cracked up to be—and more. The weather is usually warm, and the locals are friendly. The pace is very relaxed. Fine restaurants abound along the waterfront and along State Street, the main drag. Colorful boutiques and large department stores cater to every need. Every Sunday, arts and crafts are displayed along the sidewalk at Cabrillo Boulevard, east of the harbor. The town comes alive for the Summer Solstice Celebration in June, but August draws the biggest crowds when the Fiesta, the Old Spanish Days Festival, is held.

The Santa Barbara Yacht Club hosts regular Wet Wednesday Races, while several longer races are held throughout the year. The local Power Squadron is also quite active and plans many outings.

All in all Santa Barbara has a great deal to offer year-round. You just have to be careful coming into the harbor for the first time.